

'The Shining' Looks to Raise Hairs and Octaves in Its Opera Debut

The Minnesota Opera will debut its take on the horror novel in a new production by Pulitzer-prize winning composer Paul Moravec



(Minnesota Opera)

By [Jason Daley](#)
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Over the decades, Stephen King's horror oeuvre has been adapted into dozens of movies, television shows, plays, comic books and musical compositions (see "[Pet Sematary](#)" by The Ramones). Now, the Minnesota Opera has brought his novel, *The Shining*, to the opera stage.

The piece, which will premiere Saturday in St. Paul, was adapted by Pulitzer-prize winning composer Paul Moravec (*The Tempest Fantasy*) and one of the Opera world's most-prolific librettists, Mark Campbell. The two-hour opera is based on King's novel, not the movie by Stanley Kubrick. According to [Pamela Espeland at MinnPost](#), the idea for the piece began when the Minnesota Opera's artistic director Dale Johnson and stage director Eric Simonson decided they wanted to commission a horror opera. The company is known for its [New Works Initiative](#), a ten-year project to support new operas which so far have included *Silent Night*, *Cold Mountain*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Manchurian Candidate*. After *The Shining*, the company will premiere *Dinner at Eight* later this year.

Simonson and Johnson contacted Campbell, who has written over 15 operas, in 2012 to see if he was interested. "I'm a fan of the movie, but the movie is not operatic at all," Campbell tells Espeland. "There's no journey of any character. So I went back and read the novel and thought, 'This is a very exciting idea for an

opera.’ I didn’t really know if I could do it, but I said yes because I wanted to work with Paul [Moravec].”

Campbell got permission from King, who personally approved the libretto. Luckily, there’s no aria called “Heeere’s Johnny!” since that famous scene does not appear in the book. But Campbell says he did try to keep some of the tension from the original novel. “Pacing, suspense and tension are important in this opera. We can’t let up. It has to be relentless. But relentlessly exciting, too,” he tells Espeland. “I’ve seen operas that are just simply relentless, and I stop listening because I feel like I’m being yelled at. I hope we have created a story where we really care about [characters] Wendy and Danny and Jack and Halloran. I planted lots of very sympathetic moments early on.”

David Sanders, the company’s dramaturge, explains [in the program](#) that *The Shining* has a more subtle brand of horror than many are used to. “Ghosts take precedence over gore, large croquet mallets are used instead of hatchets, and mental illness rules over murder,” he writes. “The modern equivalent of a remote Gothic locale has absorbed evil somewhat akin to *The Haunting of Hill House*, *The Amityville Horror*, or *Rose Red*... Isolation and the overall “creep” factor is the terror of the day...”

Though the opera, which runs until May 15, has been completely sold out for months, a preview of some of the music from the show can be found at the [Minnesota Opera](#).

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